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Abhinavagupta on music

The Kashmirian thinker Abhinavagupta (c. 975-1025) is well-known chiefly for his theory of the aesthetic experience expounded in detail in the *Abhinavabhāratī* and the *Dhvanyālokalocana*. His main field of interest was, however, philosophy and religion. Theological works of Abhinavagupta represent for the most part the tantric tradition *Trika*, which he considered to be the highest form of Śaivism¹. Having support from the *Pratyabhijñā* metaphysics he proposed a learned exegesis of Śaiva scriptures² and organized their diverse teachings into a coherent system of doctrines and practices. His exegetical activity constitutes the third stage of the development of the *Trika*³. In his tantric and philosophical works Abhinavagupta, wishing to explain all human experiences as forms of the all-containing absolute consciousness, took up also aesthetic questions. In the *Tantrāloka* and the *Parātrimśikāvivaraṇa* he repeatedly attests the presence of music and dance in the *Trika* ritual⁴.

¹ PTV: 217. Abhinavagupta dedicated some of his works to other Śaiva traditions: *Krama* and *Pratyabhijñā*.

² Abhinavagupta's exposition of the *Trika* doctrine and ritual is based mainly on the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, which he regarded as the supreme scriptural authority.

³ SANDERSON 1988: 696.

⁴ According to Alexis Sanderson an interest in aesthetics among the Śaivas of Kashmir reflects the importance of dance and music in their liturgies and the aestheticism of the *Kaula* esoteric practices (SANDERSON 1987: 9).

Apart from ritual application Abhinavagupta was concerned with the theory of music, which he made an object of an extensive research. In his learned commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *Abhinavabhāratī*, Abhinavagupta elaborates theoretical questions, such as types of musical instruments, modes of playing various instruments, notes (*svara*), scales (*grāma*), time-measure (*tala*), tempo (*laya*) and classification of songs. Discussing musicological intricacies the Kashmirian scholar presents alternative interpretations and positions of his learned predecessors. He demonstrates familiarity with concepts of recognized authorities in musicology: Kohala⁵, Nandikeśvara⁶, Kāśyapa⁷, Nārada⁸, Viśākṣhilācārya⁹, Dattila¹⁰, Maṭaṅga¹¹, Mātṛgupta¹², Utpaladeva¹³, Kīrtidhara¹⁴, Bhaṭṭa Gopāla¹⁵ and others; he mostly refers to them in order to justify his own opinions.

The ease with which he discusses practical problems, such as modes of playing instruments or musical ornaments (*alaṃkāra*), allows us to suppose that he himself was a dedicated musician. This

⁵ ABh, comm. on 29.8, Vol. IV, p. 68; comm. on 32.243, Vol. IV, p. 336; comm. on 32.411, Vol. IV, pp. 378, 379.

⁶ ABh, comm. on 29.112, Vol. IV, p.116; on 29.112, Vol. IV, p. 119.

⁷ ABh, comm. on 28.141, Vol. IV, p. 61; comm. on 29.8, Vol. IV, pp. 67, 68; comm. on 29.14, Vol. IV, p. 70.

⁸ ABh, comm. on 28.9, Vol. IV, p.6; comm. on 28.21, Vol. IV, p.10; comm. on 29.43, Vol. IV, p. 89.

⁹ ABh., comm. on 28.9, Vol. IV, p.6.; comm. on 28.23, Vol. IV, p.16; comm. on 29.14, Vol. IV p. 77.

¹⁰ ABh, comm. on 29.71, Vol. IV, p.98; comm. on 31.30-32, Vol. IV, p. 163; comm. on 31.41, Vol. IV, p. 175.

¹¹ ABh, comm. on 28.35, Vol. IV, p.33; comm. on 28.141, Vol. IV, p. 61; comm. on 29.8, Vol. IV, p. 67.

¹² ABh., comm. on 28.21, Vol. IV, p.11; comm. on 28.26, Vol. IV, p. 19; comm. on 29.64, Vol. IV, p. 96.

¹³ ABh., comm. on 28.64-65, Vol. IV, p.41; comm. on 29.30-32, Vol. IV, p.85; comm. on 31.26, Vol. IV, p.160.

¹⁴ ABh, comm. on 4.320, Vol. I, p.208; comm. on 29.93-94, Vol. IV, p.108; comm. on 29.112, Vol. IV, p.116.

¹⁵ ABh, comm. on 12.14, Vol. II, p. 97.

thesis is supported by the testimony of one of his pupils, Madhurāja Yogin, who most probably originated from the south of India¹⁶ and came to Kashmir attracted by the fame of Abhinavagupta¹⁷. He composed a short piece entitled the *Dhyānaśloka*s describing in four stanzas the master surrounded by his pupils and devotees:

May the venerable God Dakṣināmūrti, who is an incarnation of Lord Śrīkaṇṭha and has come to Kashmir out of great compassion in the bodily form of Abhinava, protect us!

He is sitting on a golden throne covered with soft cushions and equipped with a canopy adorned with pearls, in a pavilion decorated with crystals, in the middle of a vineyard. The pavilion, decorated with pictures and smeared with sandal paste etc., is intensely smelling of garlands of flowers, incense and oil lamps. It constantly resounds with instrumental music and songs accompanied by dance. It is crowded with a multitude of *yoginīs* and *siddhas*.

He is attended by all groups of pupils, Kṣemarāja and others, who are sitting at his feet and carefully writing down whatever he says, and by two ritual partners (*dūti*), who are standing at his side. One *dūti* is carrying a jar of *śivarasa*¹⁸ in one hand and a citron in the other. The other *dūti* is carrying a box with betel in one hand and a lotus in the other.

His rolling eyes indicate a state of bliss. In the middle of his forehead a tilaka mark is clearly painted with ashes. His ears shine with the *rudrākṣa*. His hair is tied with a garland. He wears a long beard. His body is glowing. His neck is dark and shining due to the *yakṣapaṅka*¹⁹ powder. The sacred thread (*upavīta*) is loosened. He is wearing a silken piece of cloth, bright like the moonbeams.

He is sitting in the *vīrāsana* posture. He is carrying a *rudrākṣa* rosary in his hand resting on his knee and making a gesture of clear

¹⁶ V. Raghavan informs that Madhurāja was also called Mādhura, which might be either a variant or a nickname after his native place Madhurā (RAGHAVAN 1981: 29).

¹⁷ On Madhurāja Yogin and his works see PANDEY 1963: 257-260.

¹⁸ *Śivarasa* – an intoxicant made of fermented rice.

¹⁹ *Yakṣapaṅka* – a perfumed paste made of camphor, *Aquilaria agallocha*, musk, sandalwood and *kakkola* plant.

knowledge of the highest Śiva. With fingertips of his lotus-like left hand he is playing the *nāda* lute.²⁰

The above passage presents Abhinavagupta playing the lute (*vīṇā*) in the company of his pupils and other devotees of Śiva. To be more precise, the instrument is called here *nāda vīṇā*, which may be an allusion to the theory holding that the absolute consciousness has the nature of sound. Accordingly, K.C. Pandey translates the expression *nāda vīṇā* as 'the Vīṇā which is capable of producing original musical sound (Nāda)'.²¹ It is also possible that *nāda* is here only a name for a particular type of lute. Madhurāja Yogin probably describes one of the collective rituals or its preparatory stage. Details, such as the presence of *yoginīs* and *dūtis*, let us suppose that it was a *Kaula* ritual, whose participants used pleasant sensations in order to produce an elevated state of consciousness. The poem contains an enumeration of objects appealing to different sense organs, i.e. vocal and instrumental music – pleasing to the ear; wall pictures and dance – pleasing to the eye; in-

²⁰ *drākṣārāmasya madhye sphaṭikamañimaye maṇḍape citraramye
puṣpasragdhūpadīpair bahalaparimale carcite candanādyaiḥ |
vādyair gītaiḥ sanṛtyaiḥ satatamukharite yoginīsiddhasamghair
ākīrṇe svarṇapīṭhe mṛdūtalimatāle baddhamuktāvītāne ||
āsīnaḥ kṣemarājaprabhṛtibhir akhilair sevitaḥ śiṣyavargaiḥ
pādopānte niṣaṇṇair avahitaḥ dayair uktam uktam likhadbhiḥ |
dvābhyāṃ pārsvasatthitābhyāṃ śivarasakarakaṃ pūrṇatāmbūlapēṭiṃ
dūtībhyāṃ bibhṛatībhyāṃ aparakaralanamātulingotpalābhyāṃ ||
ānandāndolītākṣaḥ sphuṭakṛtatilako bhasmanā bhālamadhye
rudrākṣollāsikarṇaḥ kalitakacabharo mālayā lambakūrcāḥ |
raktāṅgo yakṣapaṅkollasadasitaḥ galō lambamuktopavītaḥ
kṣaumaṃ vāso vasānaḥ śaśikaradhavalam vīrayogāsanaṣṭhaḥ |
jānvāsaktaikahastaḥ sphuṭaparamaśivajñānamudrākṣasūtraḥ
vāmaśrīpāṇipadmasphuritanakhamukhair vādayan nādavīṇāṃ |
śrīkaṇṭheśāvatāraḥ paramakarūṇayā prāptakaśmīradeśaḥ
śrīmān naḥ pātu sāṅśād abhinavavapuṣā dakṣiṇāmūrtidevaḥ ||*

PANDEY 1963: 738.

All translations from Sanskrit are my own unless otherwise stated. The above passage has been also translated by Pandey in *ibidem*: 21-22.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

cense, sandalwood and flowers – appealing to the organ of smell; and the *śivarasa* – causing pleasure in the organ of taste.

In the monistic system of the *Trika* the absolute self known as Śiva manifests itself as the plurality of individual subjects and manifold objects which constitute the content of their experience. The universal consciousness is described as the cognitive light (*prakāśa*) characterized by the self-awareness (*vimarśa*). The self-awareness constitutes the creative power of consciousness (*Śakti*): Śiva creates the universe reflecting upon himself. The same power underlies creative activity of an individual subject and all his cognitive acts, including the aesthetic experience. We are taught by Abhinavagupta's predecessor Utpaladeva that the self without self-awareness would be insentient as crystal, which passively reflects the objects being in its immediate vicinity²². Accordingly, Śiva is not merely a mirror reflecting the reality within himself: as a dynamic principle the consciousness continuously vibrates and assumes diverse forms out of its unrestricted freedom. Śiva remains in the conscious relation with himself constituting both the subject and the object of cognition. Self-awareness forms therefore not only the characteristic feature of the self: rather, it is its dynamism and mode of existence.

In accordance with her manifold functions, the creative power of Śiva, *Śakti*, appears in various forms: in fact the whole universe is permeated by female powers considered to be her emanations. One of her most essential aspects is *Vāc* (the Speech or the Sound), which reflects the importance of *mantras* in the tantric traditions. The *Trika* proposed an elaborated metaphysics of Speech indicating her evolution from a subtle, undifferentiated stage to the grossest form of the perceptible sound²³. Accordingly, *Parā Vāc* (Supreme Speech) represents the primordial stage of *Śakti* perfectly united with the light of consciousness. *Parā Śakti*, identified with the creative aspect of the self, constitutes the essence of the reality. This stage is prior to the

²² ĪPK, 1.5.11.

²³ For the tantric theory of Speech see comprehensive study of André Padoux (PADOUX 1992).

cosmic manifestation, any form of dualism has not yet come to being, including the fundamental distinction between *vācaka* (expressive) and *vācya* (that which the sound stands for, that which is expressed)²⁴. *Parā Śakti*, though being pure and undifferentiated, holds within herself the germs of the whole future manifestation²⁵. Commenting on Utpaladeva's *kārikā* 1.5.13. Abhinavagupta states:

Self-awareness (*pratyavamarśa*) consists in speaking (*śabdana*) having the nature of an inner expression (*āntarābhilāpa*). This speaking is independent from [linguistic] convention (*saṅketa*). It consists in an uninterrupted relish (*avicchinnaśāntakāra*) and resembles an internal nod of one's head²⁶. Since it underlies other cognitions (*pratyavamarśāntara*), such as 'It is blue' or 'I am Caitra', it constitutes life of conventional language belonging to the sphere of Māyā and consisting of sounds, such as 'a' etc. It is called the Supreme (*Parā*) because it is perfect. It is [called] Speech (*Vāc*) because it speaks, i.e. utters the universe in the act of self-awareness. Therefore it [*Vāc*] always arises on its own, in the conscious form, resting in itself. As 'I' it is eternal and never ceases to exist. It is called the primary autonomy of the Lord, [his] sovereignty, the lordship, the independence from anything else.²⁷

We see that it is the phonic power which creates and sustains the universe. Divine Speech underlies not only all objects of the em-

²⁴ The term *vācaka* denotes that which expresses, i.e. the phonic power, while the *vācya* refers to the object which is to be produced by it.

²⁵ Cf. PADOUX 1992: 172-188.

²⁶ The expression *antarmukhaṣironirdeśaprakhyā* is not completely clear. I rely here on the commentary of Bhāskara (ĪPV, Vol. I, p. 253).

²⁷ *pratyavamarśaś ca āntarābhilāpātmaśābdanasvabhāvaḥ, tac ca śabdanaṃ saṅketanirapekṣam eva avicchinnaśāntakārātmakam antarmukhaṣironirdeśaprakhyam akārādīmāyīyasāṅketikaśābdajīvitabhūtam – nīlam idaṃ caitro 'ham ity ādipratyavamarśāntarabhittibhūtatvāt, pūrṇatvāt parā, vakti viśvam abhilapati pratyavamarśena iti ca vāk, ata eva sā svarasena cidrūpatayā svātmaviśrāntivapuṣā uditā sadānastamitā nityā aham ity eva | etad eva paramātmāno mukhyaṃ svātantryam aiśvaryam īśitṛtvam ananyāpekṣitvam ucyate |* ĪPV, Vol. I, pp. 252-254. This passage has been translated also by Padoux in PADOUX 1992: 175-176.

pirical world, but also limited subjects, their cognitive acts and conventional languages through which they communicate.

The creative activity of Śiva is called here *śabdana*, which emphasizes the very act or process of speaking rather than the result of it. As Raffaele Torella explains it, 'this is not *śabda* but *śabdana*, 'power of verbalization, of symbolization, which makes reflective awareness possible and even constitutes its very essence'²⁸. Śiva is identified with pure Sound while his Śakti is this vibrating power which makes him sound²⁹.

Though *Parā Vāc* is too subtle to be heard, it constitutes a source and substratum of perceptible sounds.

The first stage of gross manifestation of *Vāc*, where a slight sense of duality arises, is called *Paśyantī*. In fact, the very name *Paśyantī* (Perceiving) implies the existence of an object which is to be perceived³⁰, however, the differentiation is not yet fully developed³¹. At this stage the initial unity of consciousness is disturbed by the appearance of desire to act, i.e. to appear in diverse forms. The next stage, *Madhyamā Vāc* (Intermediate), brings about a mental awareness of the differentiation, i.e. of the distinction between the expressive (*vācaka*) and expressed (*vācya*) or between word (*śabda*) and meaning (*artha*)³². This level is characterized by the emergence of discursive thoughts, which inevitably involves the distinction into subject and object of the thought. These distinctions appear in the intellect or within the divine consciousness only because the universe has not yet come to being³³. The last stage of *Vāc*, called *Vaikhari*

²⁸ TORELLA 2001: 858.

²⁹ The distinction between Śiva and Śakti is simply speculative. In fact, they are always united.

³⁰ Cf. TORELLA 2002: XIX.

³¹ With regard to the hierarchical scheme of cosmic manifestation, *Paśyantī* corresponds to the *sadāśiva tattva*.

³² *Madhyamā Vāc* corresponds to the *īśvara tattva* and the *śuddhāvidyā tattva*.

³³ Cf. PADOUX 1992: 206.

(Uttered), is marked by the appearance of the gross manifestation, i.e. the empirical universe with all its constituents and the actual language consisting of sounds and articulated in vocal organs with the help of breath. On this level the previously initiated process of differentiation is completed: the dualism of word and meaning becomes clear³⁴.

The aforesaid theory of the *Vāc* evolution explains also the phenomenon of music. Sounds produced by musical instruments, as all other phenomena of the manifested universe, are ontologically grounded in *Parā Vāc*. At the *Paśyanī* stage there appears in consciousness an intention to produce musical sounds. It may be said that musical notes are already present in a subtle, imperceptible form. The actual musical sounds, perceivable to the ear, are placed on the level of *Madhyamā Vāc*. It is worth emphasizing that musical sounds, though being produced by 'material' instruments, do not belong to the plane of gross manifestation. Consequently, the *Vaikhari* level is not distinguished with regard to instrumental music. Abhinavagupta puts it briefly in the *Tantrāloka*:

Madhyamā Vāc in a gross form is a sound (*dhvani*) arising in the instruments covered with skin etc. because it is [at the same time] distinct and indistinct.

The charm (*raktatā*) of *Madhyamā* consists in the aspect of indistinctiveness (*avibhāgāmśa*). This [object] is attractive in so far as in it there is *Vāc* consisting of indiscernible sounds.

The aspect of indistinctiveness should be considered as giving pleasure. Indeed, out of rhythmic patterns (*tālapaṭha*) the people find pleasure in music consisting of unclear (*avyakta*) sounds.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. PADOUX 1992: 216-222.

³⁵ *yat tu carmāvanaddhādi kiṃcit tattraīṣa yo dhvaniḥ // 241*
sa sphuṭāsphuṭarūpatvān madhyamā sthūlarūpiṇī /
madhyāyās cāvibhāgāmśasadbhāva iti raktatā // 242
avibhāgasvaramayī yatra syāt tat suraṅjakam /
avibhāgo hi nirvṛtyai dṛśyatām tālapaṭhataḥ // 243
kilāvvyaktadhvanau tasmīn vādane parituṣyati / TĀ, 3. 241b-244 a.

The *Viveka* of Jayaratha elucidates laconic statements of Abhinavagupta. The commentator clarifies that indistinctiveness of instrumental music consists in the fact that it is not possible to discern constitutive elements as one could divide utterance into smaller, clearly defined sound units (phonemes)³⁶. We see that according to Abhinavagupta the appeal of music results from its indistinctiveness. It is the reason why it enchants listeners and takes their hearts.

The question which immediately suggests itself is whether vocal music could be classified in the same way. Bearing in mind that singing depends on breath flow interacting with speech organs, one would be inclined to locate it on the plane of *Vaikharī* rather than that of *Madhyamā*. Except for vocal improvisations making use of non-linguistic syllables, vocal music is, in most cases, based on words consisting of phonemes. This fact would also weigh in favour of *Vaikharī*, whose distinctive feature is the fact that it can be differentiated in smaller units. However, it should be not forgotten that though vocal music may be regarded as a kind of sustained speech, the essence of singing lies in these features by which the regular speech is enriched (rhythm, tonality). On this subject K. C. Pandey comments: 'the musical notes, though produced by the passing of air through different places of articulation, are recognized to be inarticulate, because they do not involve clear pronunciation of letters'³⁷. Though this argument may seem controversial because singers generally care about clear articulation, it gives justice to the idea of Abhinavagupta. Vocal music cannot be located at the level of *Vaikharī* because its primary aim is not to convey meaning, i.e. evoke a concept or an image of an object conventionally associated with the word, but to evoke an aesthetic pleasure.

³⁶ Jayaratha puts it in the following way: *varṇādivibhāgānullāsac cāspṛuṭaḥ* (comm. on TĀ, 3. 242a).

³⁷ PANDEY 1959: 564. Cf. DESHPANDE 1992: 117.

In Pandey's view vocal music belongs to the *Paśyantī* level, while instrumental music is located on the plane of *Madhyamā* (PANDEY 1959: 565).

Since music belongs to the *Madhyamā* level, where the differentiation is not yet clearly established, it is closer to the ultimate level of consciousness than the 'gross' constituents of the reality. Some forms of music are placed by Abhinavagupta at the *Paśyantī* level, which makes this relation even closer³⁸. Music, not contaminated by the appearance of discursive thoughts, which divide the reality and experience, seems to reflect the nature of the absolute consciousness.

The inherent dynamism of consciousness is envisaged as the luminous vibration termed *spanda*. Both terms, *spanda* and *vimarśa*, express the very same aspect of consciousness, i.e. its freedom to assume any form³⁹. The analogies with music, produced by the vibrator of a musical instrument, are easy to notice. The original vibration of the absolute self is extremely subtle and the sound which it produces is imperceptible to the ear. Gradually, the pulsation of consciousness condenses, which results in 'gross' manifestation. The process is reversible: the whole emanation finally dissolves within the ultimate source.

In the *Trika* Śaivism another 'sonic' term, *nāda*, is used to describe the nature of the absolute consciousness. The *nāda*, being a very subtle stage of *Vāc*, is often qualified as *anāhata* (lit. 'unstruck')⁴⁰, which emphasizes the fact that it is the sound not produced by a material instrument. To be precise, *nāda* denotes the first condensation of the primeval sound vibration, which begins to manifest the universe. It is, as Padoux puts it, 'more akin to the resonance following a sound than to the sound itself', which again accounts for its subtle character⁴¹. Apart from this metaphysical meaning, the term often occurs in the sense of an ordinary, audible sound produced by a musical instrument or the resonance following it.

Close affinity between the primeval sound and the empirical music explains why it was considered to be an effective means to

³⁸ Cf. TĀ, 3.237-241a.

³⁹ For the concept of *spanda* see detailed study of DYCKOWSKI 1989.

⁴⁰ Cf. TĀ, 6.217.

⁴¹ Cf. PADOUX 1992: 97, fn. 30.

reveal the blissful nature of the consciousness. The yogic practices making use of music are attested in the *Vijñānabhairavatantra*:

If someone is perfectly concentrated on the prolonged (*dirgha*) sounds of string instruments and others, then, since they appear successively (*kramasamsthiteḥ*), he becomes one with the supreme ether (*paramavyoman*).⁴²

We see that concentration on the resonance following musical sound, which still vibrates but becomes less audible, may reveal to the adept the non-audible vibration of his own consciousness.

The same scripture prescribes the following practice:

The yogin, who is completely immersed in the incomparable pleasure of tasting a song and other objects, becomes identified with it [this pleasure] because his mind is expanded (*manorūḍheḥ*) due to this immersion.

Wherever the mind finds pleasure, it should concentrate on it. In every such case the nature of the highest bliss manifests itself.⁴³

The bliss (*ānanda*) is one of the terms, as *vimarśa* and *spanda*, expressing the nature of the supreme consciousness. All pleasant sensations of an individual may be regarded as reflection of the absolute bliss. Though all that exists constitutes an aspect of the universal consciousness and all cognitions (*parāmarśa*) of the limited subject are ontologically grounded in *Parā Vāc*, the primordial vibration becomes gradually condensed in the process of manifestation and therefore difficult to grasp. Despite of the fact that there is continuation between the vibration of ultimate consciousness and the content of individual experience, in common sense perceptions and inner cognitions it is obscured by discursive thoughts (*vikalpas*).

⁴² *tantryādivādyasabdeṣu dirgheṣu kramasamsthiteḥ
ananyacetāḥ pratyante paravyomavapur bhavet*, VBh, 41.

⁴³ *gītādiviṣayāsvādāsamasaukhyai katātmanah |
yoginas tanmayatvena manorūḍhes tadātmatā ||
yatra yatra manastuṣṭir manas tatraiva dhārayet |
tatra tatra parānandasvārūpaṁ sampravartate ||* VBh, 73-74.

There are, however, conditions in which the nature of the self manifests itself more clearly: it is easier to grasp it during intense emotions and pleasant sensations.

With regard to this, Abhinavagupta writes:

Therefore, when indifference disappears while listening to the sound of a sweet song or smelling sandalwood etc., then there arises in the heart the state of vibration (*spandamānatā*). Such a state is termed Ānandaśakti (the Power of bliss), thanks to which man becomes sensitive (*sahṛdaya*).⁴⁴

In fact, the whole universe may be considered to be the expansion of bliss (*ānandaśaktisphara*)⁴⁵. The term *sahṛdaya* should not be restricted to an aesthete or a connoisseur: it means, more precisely, a person free from indifference, who is able to transgress *vikalpas* and rest on the subjective aspect of the consciousness.

The *spandamānatā*, the state in which subjectivity prevails, is sometimes envisaged as the expansion or the heightening of the individual consciousness. According to the teachings of the *Trika* Śiva out of his free will assumes limitations in order to appear as innumerable individual souls. Those contractions consist chiefly in obscuring omniscience and omnipotence proper to the universal self and in limiting the experience to particular time and space. The limited centres of consciousness, ignorant of their true nature, i.e. the identity with Śiva, get involved in the painful cycle of transmigration. In order to get liberated from the bondage, the individual soul has to transcend those limitations, i.e. to dissolve distinction between subject and object. The purpose of the adept is to expand an individual consciousness contracted in the process of manifestation of the universe. The liberation while living (*jīvanmukti*) is considered as the

⁴⁴ *tathā hi madhure gīte sparśe vā candanādike ||
mādhyasthyavigame yāsau hṛdaye spandamānatā
ānandaśaktiḥ saivoktā yataḥ sahṛdayo janaḥ ||* TĀ, 3.209b-210.

⁴⁵ Cf. BÄUMER 2003: 38.

recognition of one's own identity with Śiva and, consequently, the contemplation of the reality as the expression of the self.

The state of expanded consciousness can be achieved through pleasant sensations, which are regarded as reflection of the bliss proper to the absolute consciousness. Accordingly, in chapter 15 of the *Tantrāloka* Abhinavagupta identifies bliss (*ānanda*) with the emergence of consciousness (*unmagnatā citāḥ*) produced by objects which enchant the mind (*hṛdayahārin*)⁴⁶. The expansion of the consciousness implies the stimulation of the creative power called *vīrya*. Every creative act of an individual reflects the supreme creativity identified with beauty. At the level of the limited subject the creative power is stimulated by pleasant sensations.

The Kashmirian author writes in the *Tantrāloka*:

Its supreme power (*vīrya*) consists in the particles of the five elements and has the nature of sound, touch and taste. Since it is an object of enjoyment, it has the nature of food. Therefore, also a sweet sound produces an increase in this power. In fact, this power is considered as supreme, pure and by nature wishing to create. This power is force (*bala*), vitality (*ojas*), breath (*prāṇa*) and beauty (*kāntatā*).⁴⁷

In the *Parātrimśikāvivarṇa*⁴⁸ Abhinavagupta, while describing the 'physiology' of the aesthetic experience, refers also to the concept of the creative power (*vīrya*) by which Śiva emits the content of consciousness and reabsorbs it, regaining the state of the initial unity. Abhinavagupta states here that the content of the aesthetic experience stimulates (*br̥m̐haka*) a stir of creative power (*vīryakṣobha*):

⁴⁶ TĀ, 15.167b-169a

⁴⁷ *tas̥yāpi ca param vīryaṃ pañcabhūtakalātmakam |*
bhogyatvenānnarūpaṃ ca śabdasparsasātmakam ||
śabdo 'pi madhuro yasmād vīryopacayakārah |
taddhi vīryaṃ param śuddhaṃ visis̥ṭkṣātmakam mataṃ ||
tadbalaṃ ca tadojaś ca te prāṇāḥ s̥ā ca kāntatā, TĀ, 3.228-230 ab.

⁴⁸ Cf. NITECKA 2006.

Moreover, forms, sounds, etc. entering through the eyes, ears and other sense organs as increasing factors (*bṛṃhakarūpa*) evoke the fire of passion consisting in the stir of the power because they are able to increase.⁴⁹

Intense experiences of this kind stir up the power and by intensifying it facilitate the grasping of the dynamism of the consciousness. Every pleasant experience involves also the permanent increase of power, enabling the future sensations to be more and more intense. Particularly strong agitation of the creative power culminates in its emission (*visarga*):

In fact, the form coming through the eyes grants pleasure because the great emission consisting in the stir of this creative power takes place. The same refers to the beautiful songs etc. in the case of ears.⁵⁰

The *visarga* is a result of the activity of creative power, the real emission of universe and its reversal – the recognition of one's own identity with Śiva. The term *visarga* denotes the state of heightened consciousness, its emergence and experience of bliss⁵¹. Abhinavagupta stresses the fact that only sight and hearing are able to produce complete emission of power and enable the subject to transcend their individual limitation and to experience the highest bliss⁵².

Abhinavagupta admits, however, that if the power of consciousness is properly increased by past experiences, the vibration of consciousness may be grasped even without a simultaneous pleasant

⁴⁹ *tato 'pi punar api nayanaśravaṇādīndriyadvāreṇa bṛṃhakarūpaṃ rūpaśabdādy anupraviśad bṛṃhakatvād eva tadvīryakṣobharūpakāmānalaprabodhakaṃ bhavati* | PTV: 202.

⁵⁰ *nayanayor api hi rūpaṃ tadvīryakṣobhātmakamahāvisargaviśeṣaṇayuktyā eva sukhadāyī bhavati* | *śravaṇayoś ca madhuraḡīdī* | PTV: 202.

⁵¹ *visargaśaktir yā śambhoḥ setthaṃ sarvatra vartate* ||
tata eva samasto 'yam ānandarasavibhramah | TĀ, 3.208b-209a

The Emissional Power, which is characteristic of Śiva, acts like that everywhere. The entire agitation consisting in bliss (*ānandarasavibhrama*) originates from it.

⁵² PTV: 202.

sensation. The intensification of the creative power constitutes a precondition for expansion of individual consciousness:

Moreover, for those who are not nourished by this creative power, who do not know the bliss of passion consisting in the stir of the creative power of that kind and who are like stones, even the form of a very beautiful girl and the sweet song coming from the mouth of an attractive woman do not produce the perfect bliss.⁵³

The identification with the aesthetic object deprives the individual subject of his limitations and fills him with highest bliss. The creative power intensified in this way enables an adept to realize the nature of consciousness. If the adept of the *Trika* is skilled, such experiences may culminate in complete expansion of the self, that is, in the manifestation of Bhairava. Discovering the essential attributes of the self he transcends all dualism.

As Alexis Sanderson has shown, the practices making use of pleasant sensations developed within the cult of the families (*kula*) of *yoginīs*, which was characteristic of the early phase of the *Trika*⁵⁴. Śiva was worshipped here in a frightful form as Bhairava and accompanied by groups of terrifying female deities (*yoginīs*). The aim of a tantric adept was to invoke the goddesses and to induce them to grant him their supernatural powers. Those esoteric practices usually took place on the cremation ground and involved offerings of meat, blood, wine and a sexual intercourse with a consecrated partner. With the passing of time the character of this cult changed significantly: the dreadful *yoginīs* worshipped in the cremation ground were transformed into deities of senses (*karaṇeśvarī*, *karaṇadevatā*) and became the object of internal worship⁵⁵. The *Kaulika* rituals, which were later development of the *yoginī* cults, were aimed at the expan-

⁵³ *tathā ca tadvīryānupabṛṃhitānām avidyamānatathāvidhavīryavikṣo-bhātmakamadanānandānām pāṣāṇānām iva ramaṇīyatarataruṇīrūpam api nitambinīvadanaghūrṇamānakālikālagītam api na pūrṇānandaparyavasāyi* | PTV: 202.

⁵⁴ SANDERSON 1988: 671-72.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*: 680.

sion of the consciousness and at the suspension of individual limitations. As the *karāṇeśvarīs* the *yoginīs* were also to be propitiated by intense pleasant sensations, which may reveal to the adept the bliss of his own consciousness. In the later phase of the *Trika*, represented by exegetical works of Abhinavagupta, Bhairava is not only a terrifying deity worshipped in the transgressive rituals. He became identified with the absolute consciousness, which should be experienced as the adept's true identity. Accordingly, the *Bhairavābhivṛtya* constituting the highest goal of the adept is not regarded as the manifestation of the frightful deity on the cremation ground, but as the self-realization, the experience of the nature of the consciousness⁵⁶.

Among numerous methods leading to the expansion of consciousness a special importance is attributed to the collective rituals. The detailed description of the *kulayāga* in chapter 29 of the *Tantrāloka* indicates that sexual rituals were still practiced in the time of Abhinavagupta⁵⁷. The purpose of such rituals was, however, not only to produce sexual fluids, which could be offered to the deities, but, first of all, they were meant to bring about higher states of consciousness⁵⁸. For the same reason music and dance were included into ritual: they were performed in order to gratify the goddesses and to reveal the dynamism of the absolute consciousness.

In chapter 28 of the *Tantrāloka* Abhinavagupta refers to the collective ritual called *cakrayāga*, in which members of a specific teaching lineage (*svasantānādi*) participate⁵⁹. The devotees meet on an auspicious day and take their place in concentric circles around the guru. Apart from offerings of wine and meat, the ritual involves also music and dance, and may culminate in a sexual intercourse. Abhinavagupta states explicitly that these collective rituals cause an expansion of consciousness, which is divided and limited in the separate bodies. The learned author explains that during collective rituals all

⁵⁶ PTV: 203.

⁵⁷ For details see the study of John R. Dupuche (DUPUCHE 2006).

⁵⁸ SANDERSON 1988: 680.

⁵⁹ TĀ, 28.371-385.

the participants who are listening to the music or watching dance performance have common experience. It leads to the suspension of individual differences and the expansion (*vikāsa*) of consciousness, which at least for a short while becomes universal. Abhinavagupta explains it in the following way:

The stream of own rays (i.e. the content of individual experience) comes out (*ucchalan*)⁶⁰ and is reflected in the consciousnesses of all [participants] as if in many mirrors. It shines and easily becomes universal.⁶¹

When the consciousness becomes universal, i.e. when it goes beyond individual limitations, it is pervaded by the highest bliss. Abhinavagupta compares the *cakrayāga* to an ordinary music concert and dance performance. When all spectators are concentrated and identified with an object of cognition (*tanmayībhāva*), they experience perfect bliss. Abhinavagupta writes:

Because of this reason the bliss (*hlāda*) arises during gatherings, such as dance performances and music concerts, when all spectators are immersed in the object of experience, not only some of them.⁶²

Consciousness, considered individually, is also (*pratyekam*) filled with bliss; then, during a dance performance it achieves the state of unity and attains the complete bliss (*pūrṇānandatva*).⁶³

Egoistic desires constitute in the opinion of Abhinavagupta the main factor responsible for the contraction of consciousness. They dichotomize the experience, make a subject consider himself to be different from the object. The experience of a separate object always

⁶⁰ Jayaratha, commenting on this passage glosses *ucchalan nija-raśmyoghaḥ* with *bahih prasaraṇaṁ indriyamarīcipuñja*.

⁶¹ *ucchalan nijaraśmyoghaḥ saṁvitsu pratibimbataḥ || bahudarpaṇavad dīptaḥ sarvāyetāprayatnataḥ | TĀ, 28.374b-375a*

⁶² *ata eva nṛitagīlaprabhṛtau bahuparśadi || yaḥ sarvatanmayībhāve hlādo natv ekakasya saḥ | TĀ, 28.375b-376;*

Gnoli – *nṛitagīlaprabhṛtau: gītagīlaprabhṛtau* (GNOLI 1968: XXXIX).

⁶³ *ānanda-nirbharā saṁvit pratyekam sā tathaikatām || nṛitādaḥ viṣaye prāptā pūrṇānandatvam aśnute | TĀ, 28.376b-378a*

implies a certain reaction to it: attachment, disgust or indifference, which constitute obstacles to blissful resting on one's own consciousness. A person obsessed by egoistic desires is not able to concentrate and identify with the object and to transform objective cognition into the experience of one's own self (*ahamvimarśa*). Their mind would be constantly disturbed by appearance of discursive thoughts. The state of expansion presupposes the removal of all obstacles such as anger, envy or hate:

Due to the absence of causes limiting the consciousness, anger, envy, etc. the expanded consciousness is filled with bliss because it is devoid of obstacles.⁶⁴

Abhinavagupta warns that if even one person is not completely concentrated on the object of experience, it will destroy the already achieved state of universal consciousness. In his opinion devotees who are not able to concentrate on aesthetic data should be excluded from such gatherings.

The same ritual is described in details in the *Jayadrathayāmala-tantra*. It is interesting to note in this connection that this *tantra* prescribes the use of two instruments, the *vīṇā* (lute) and the *vaṃśa* (flute)⁶⁵.

The idea that listening to music during a concert and watching a dance performance are an effective methods to dispense with individual limitations is expressed also in the *Abhinavabhāratī*.

Due to the uniformity (*ekaghanatā*) of the audience experience the taste becomes intensified. It is possible because of the fact that all have the same latent traces (*vasanā*).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *īrṣyāsūyādisaṅkocakāraṇābhāvato 'tra sā ||*

vikasvarā nīpratighaṃ samvid ānandayoginī | TĀ, 28.378b-379a

⁶⁵ I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Alexis Sanderson for enabling me to use his unpublished edition of the *Jayadrathayāmala-tantra*.

⁶⁶ *ata eva sarvasāmājikānām ekaghanatayaiva pratipatteḥ sutarām rasa-paripoṣāya sarveṣām anādivāsanāvicitrikṭacetasām vāsanāsamvadāt* ABh.Gn, 13-14.

One could expect that the same state of unity should arise when a group of people simultaneously perceives an ordinary object. In the opinion of Abhinavagupta it is not impossible but difficult to achieve. The ordinary cognition such as 'this is a pot' is transitory and immediately followed by another, for example: 'It is blue' or 'It is small'. In fact, it rarely happens that two or more subjects have the same cognition at the same moment. This is the reason why Abhinavagupta finds aesthetic experiences to be more suitable for the expansion of consciousness: the subject may immerse in the pleasant experiences and contemplate their objects. In his interpretation the performative arts constitute one of the most powerful means for the development of an individual consciousness.

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